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ABSTRACT

Language experience can integrate the curriculum through planned and spontaneous activities, regardless of the student's age or level of skill. The components of an integrated day through language experience are the language activities--listening, speaking, writing, and reading. Opportunities for engaging in language range from formal to informal and from reality to fantasy and involve oral and written reporting, choral speaking, creative dramatics, imaginative study writing, and reading and listening to informational and recreational literature. Given the necessary program prerequisites and components, the integrated-day format permits the operation of language in its full communicative function, as a natural part of all learning. The prerequisites are: (1) an atmosphere that prevades the classroom to make it a place where respect for the individual is evident and where there is ample time to experience and learn; and (2) the organization of classroom space to permit individualization of learning options. (MB)

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INTEGRATING THE DAY THROUGH LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE

It is a fact, apparently, of both biological and social existence that the more complex the structure, the more diverse and specialized are its component parts. Therefore, the higher an organism is on the phylogenetic scale, the more intricate and particular are its organs of adaptation and survival. Compare, for example, the simple process of cell division in the amoeba with the sexual reproductive process of higher order species. Likewise, the evolution of social institutions is characterized by increasing diversity and specialization. Pre-industrial societies, for example, supported 'cottage' industries in which one individual or family was responsible for a product from the inception to the completion of its manufacture. This may have involved everything from growing the crops which were used in the making of the product to marketing it. The press, however, for greater speed and efficiency led to a division of labor in which each individual was responsible only for a single component of the product. So, in order to meet a production deadline, Eli Whitney devised and introduced the rudiments of mass production into the manufacture of rifles. This pattern of development was to be mirrored in other social institutions besides industry--and education was one of these. Schools of rural America were (and still are in some instances) simple: one individual whose function it was to teach 30 or more youngsters of diverse ages and backgrounds and skills. A combination of factors including a growing population through successive waves of immigration, increasing urbanization, and legislation mandating universal primary and secondary education contributed to the bureaucritization of the schools. The one-room schoolhouse was to be replaced, in large measure,

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by age-graded and curriculum-bound (with the introduction of textbooks) classes.

Perhaps not as much a fact as the trend toward diversification, yet, nevertheless, very much a reality is the evidence of periods of reflection which lie interspersed and alternating with times of rapid expansion and development. Within such intermittent and recurrent phases there is often a good deal of social criticism espoused within which a spate of utopian models are described. These typically incorporate romantic notions of an earlier and simpler existence. For example, much of the criticism of education in the last decade had as its recurrent theme "deschooling" schools, making them simpler, less bureaucracies than places in which to learn. The notion of an integrated day which incorporates flexible grouping across age- and curricular - categories and the absence of a fixed schedule for instructional purposes is an example of this reverse tendency (Walton, 1971).

To appreciate the full significance of curricular trends such as the integrated day it is necessary to set them within the context of the Hegelian-like dialectic of events and pressures which contributed to their development. However, the particular form that such innovations take are more than merely chance events on the pendulum's swing. They represent, instead, a conscious attempt to remedy or alter conditions that are considered to be detrimental to the educative process. The notion of an integrated day was proposed to relieve the pernicious effects of increasing particularization and fragmentation on learning. Instruction in the

English language arts -- listening, speaking, reading and writing -- is often representative of this kind of fragmentation. Reading is most often prioritized and segregated from the others with large blocks of time devoted to its teaching in each day's schedule. Listening and speaking typically receive the least amount of attention, while instruction in written composition is usually divided into functional and 'creative' writing periods. The meshing of language arts instruction with other curriculum areas is usually only perfunctorily accomplished as in having the children write the answers to social studies questions, or read from the science text in preparation for a quiz.

This is quite paradoxical because rather than being isolated and compartmentalized, the language arts can serve as the concatenating link which integrates the curriculum. It is conceivable that the integrated day can be most naturally and effectively accomplished through language experiences. This seems to be good pedagogy since such a plan recognizes the fact, first, that communication is part of all learning and, second, that when language activities are both integral and functional in the total teaching plan, they may be more easily mastered than when they are taught separately and artificially. There is even some empirical evidence that integration of language arts instruction has a salutary effect on children's attitudes (Smith and Hansen, 1976).

How does this integration occur? A kindergarten class in an urban community studied the process of chick incubation over several weeks.

From the day that the 18 eggs and incubator (made of 'found' materials by another teacher the year before) arrived, they embarked on a fascinating excursion involving mathematics, science and social studies learnings. Throughout the entire period they made observations and recorded their findings. They listened to and later perused books the teacher read about chicks, and embryos and the incubation process. They dictated their impressions and observations, and read these back from various charts onto which the teacher had recorded them. They graphed the weight of the eggs at daily intervals. They studied and discussed the appearance of a developing embryo from an egg that had been broken. A log was kept of each day's observations. During the entire period the teacher took and kept a photographic record of the events. These eventually were incorporated into a class book with captions to the photos dictated by the children. This book was read and reread many times.

This is just one example of the way in which language experiences can integrate the curriculum. Although it occurred in a kindergarten, the episode represents the basic elements of such a plan whether it be in the primary, intermediate or upper grades: using planned and sometimes spontaneous activities as the leitmotif of the curriculum; and highlighting language activities as they occur naturally and necessarily as part of the learning. The older the children the more complex and, often, longer the investigation will be. But, regardless of age or level of skill, listening, speaking, reading and writing will be natural and integral components of the children's

work. To facilitate the operation of such a plan, there are, of course, certain necessary prerequisites and components.

PREREQUISITES

The most fundamental requirement and, perhaps, the most elusive is the atmosphere that pevades the classroom. It must be a place where respect for the individual is paramount, where trust is evident and where there is ample time to experience and learn. If these requirements sound like the usual educational platitudes, reflect a moment on the meaning behind the words. A teacher who really respects the individual child will design most of the learning episodes for the individual. Only occasionally will there be group instruction, perhaps for skill development, and rarely will the entire class be found working in unison on a given task. Respect means, as well, not the homogenizing of unique learning styles, but capitalizing on them. Underlying this respect is the teacher's belief in the children's capacity, with proper guidance and intervention, when appropriate, to be responsible participants rather than passive recipients in the teaching/learning process.

A complement of respect is trust, mutual trust between children and teacher. Bernstein (1975) observes that less structured classrooms such as an integrated day design, allow a closer surveillance of the child and manifest control in more implicit and interpersonal terms than more structured settings. In a sense, the child is more vulnerable in such a classroom particularly when she or he is asked to express thoughts and feelings freely and regularly as part of the plan. Respect for the child

will help to build the kind of trust necessary for the children to operate openly and freely.

Finally, it may seem almost axiomatic but children need time to learn. They need time to experience, to observe, to discuss findings, to encode their observations, to reflect on them, and to read them back. Many classrooms, unfortunately, are characterized instead by a rather frantic pace in which the completion of required assignments, and the finishing of courses of study, units, blocks of curricula, and graded texts leave no time to experience, to savor, to reflect and to learn. Without this kind of time there can be no integrated day.

Another important category of prerequisites resides in the organization of the classroom: the arrangement of space and the individualization of learning options. An integrated day plan is facilitated by a design in which desks are grouped into several clusters rather than rows to permit independent and small group projects, and in which the space is divided into interest centers around various curriculum areas. Some of these centers, typically mathematics, science and language arts, will persist with minor modification through the year. Others, more temporary, will be constructed and then dismantled as interest and work on a particular project develops and then wanes. For example, a special center was designed to house the tools (books and source materials of various kinds) of a third-grade class' study of the effects of pollution from a local electrical utility plant, as well as to display the results of their continuing investigation -- photographs, charts and graphs, and evidence of pollution collected from field trips.

There are two important points to be noted. First, space is seen as fluid and functional. Its use is considered to be flexible and is modified according to the changing needs of the class. Second, every project, whether individual or group, and each interest center contains a communication component. There is a section devoted in each center to the public communication of information related to a given project. This, combined with the keeping of individual logs for the regular recording - pictorial, graphic, written, or combination - of experience makes communication an integral and natural component of all activities. Listening, speaking, reading and writing are engaged in continuously.

Within each interest center, the individualization of instructional materials will facilitate a teaching plan that is centered on individual interests and needs. A simple coding system, perhaps a combination of colors and easily distinguishable symbols, will encourage children to select and use appropriate materials. Activity cards can be prepared for review and reinforcement of skills. For example, all phonics activity cards can be identified by some symbol such as a star. Color may then be used to grade their difficulty level, so that cards bordered in blue might signify readiness level activities, red-bordered - primary, green - intermediate, and yellow - advanced. Separate cards within each color category can be numbered to denote a finer progression of difficulty level. In a like manner, reading material--trade and textbooks, magazines, reference materials and so on -- can be identified and grouped by level of

difficulty. Such a system provides access to an efficient process for the retrieval and storage of materials.

COMPONENTS

The most obvious components of an integrated day through language experience are the language activities themselves -- listening, speaking, writing and reading. My reason for inverting the order of reading and writing from the typical sequence in which they are presented is to highlight the fact that reading often occurs last in a language experience sequence. Children experience something first, discuss it, write something about it, perhaps a group experience chart, perhaps an individually dictated account, and then read this back. However, in a fully integrated language arts program there is often no linear sequence but, rather, multiple language experiences occurring simultaneously. For example, a sixth-grade class which had undertaken a quilt-making project had first become intrigued by the notion from listening to a classmate describe the quilts she had seen on a visit to a restored colonial village. They consulted reference materials, viewed filmstrips and films, and participated in many discussions prior to embarking on the project. They composed and sent letters to obtain further information. They drew up plans for the quilt designs, and decided to participate in a group log to emphasize the communal nature of this project. Listening, speaking, reading and writing were engaged in throughout all phases of their work. Integrating the day through language experience provides almost limitless opportunities to engage in language

that will range from formal to informal, from factual to fanciful: oral and written reporting; choral speaking; creative dramatics; imaginative story writing; and both reading and listening to informational and recreational literature, to note just a few.

Ongoing diagnosis of the children's performance combined with an efficient recordkeeping system constitutes another important component of such a program. With less reliance upon the use of graded materials and sequential curricula outlines, the teacher must assess the children's performance continuously so as to be able to plan instructional modification and intervention when necessary. For example, from observing the children's use of materials and activity cards, the teacher can make a determination of whether or not they have mastered certain skills, and, if not, can plan instructional sequences with those who demonstrate such a need. In just this way, a second-grade teacher found that a number of children were having difficulty with some of the independent activities that involved the skill of sound blending . In order to verify this observation, she arranged individual conferences in which she tested each child informally. The findings from this informal assessment were noted on a recording format designed to accommodate such data. She found that although they could identify and reproduce sounds in isolation, they were unable to blend them into larger units. Subsequently, the teacher arranged several sessions of small group instruction in blending for the children who needed it. The implementation of this kind of diagnostic

teaching requires both skilled observation techniques, and a thorough knowledge of skill development and teaching methodology.

Skill teaching itself comprises another component necessary for integrating the day through language experience, although it is one which is often dismissed or ignored in the literature on informal teaching arrangements. This latter stance is regrettable because it ignores the simple reality that there is a natural progression of skill development in the language arts (as in other areas) which almost all children will need instruction in at some time or another, although in varying degrees. Ignoring this reality may ultimately render an informal teaching plan ineffective. The crucial factor is not to ignore skill instruction, but to apply it intelligently when and to whom it is necessary, rather than monolithically to all children in rote fashion. That there are significant differences in the quality of skill children apply in listening, speaking, reading and writing is undeniable. For example, Golinkoff's (1975-76) review of the research revealed substantial differences in the strategies utilized by proficient and unskilled readers. Such findings are substantiated even by casual observation of children in classrooms. Therefore, children will require differentiated instruction in skills according to their demonstrated needs. Skill teaching is a natural corollary of diagnosis.

A program modeled on the integrated day format in which the language arts function to connect and articulate learnings in all curriculum areas is an ambitious, yet worthwhile undertaking. Given the necessary program

prerequisites and components, such a plan permits the operation of language in its full communicative function as a natural part of all learning. Children listen, speak, read and write regularly and without coercion in connection with all that they do in class. In this manner, language has restored to it the natural integrity of its separate components, while, at the same time, it serves as the adhesive which binds together all the disparate elements of the day's activities.

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